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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 GABORONE 000088

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SUBJECT: BOTSWANA: READ-OUT FROM PRESIDENT KHAMA ON THE
SADC SUMMIT

REF: A. HARARE 70

[1](#)B. GABORONE 82

[1](#)C. GABORONE 70

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen J. Nolan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY. During a 90 minute meeting January 29, President Khama shared his impressions of the January 26-27 SADC summit with a small group of Chiefs of Mission at his office in Gaborone. Khama described the overall dynamics of the summit and commented that he and Tanzanian President Kikwete had been the most active participants and had worked together to advocate for a fair outcome for the MDC. He characterized Robert Mugabe as more subdued and conciliatory than in previous meetings, and assessed that Mugabe may personally be ready to make a deal. However, Khama also noted that Mugabe is probably constrained by hard-liners within his inner circle. Khama also expressed some frustration with MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai, particularly with his initial public reaction to the summit communique and the MDC's tendency to reverse itself during negotiations. Finally, President Khama urged the USG and other friends of Zimbabwe to carefully craft our public reaction to the unity government if it comes about. He urged us to quickly engage at a political level with the new government, increase humanitarian assistance if possible, and to focus on the positive in our public statements so as to "offer some light at the end of the tunnel" both to the new government and the suffering Zimbabwean people. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) President Khama invited Ambassador Nolan and his counterparts from the UK, France, Germany, and the European Union to a meeting at his office January 29 regarding the January 26-27 SADC Extraordinary Summit. Khama was accompanied by Minister of Defense (and acting Foreign Minister) Seretse, MFA Permanent Secretary Samuel Oututle, MFA Deputy Permanent Secretary Sesara George, and his Chief of Protocol Daphne Kadiwa. President Khama was relaxed and forthright during the 90 minute meeting, offering the assembled diplomats a detailed and colorful exposition of the summit. Since Khama's overall account of the proceedings at the summit tracks closely with the information in reftels A and B, this cable will focus on adding detail and color regarding the summit proceedings and participants to give Washington a fuller picture.

13. (S) President Khama told the assembled diplomats that in December 2008 he phoned South African President Motlanthe to inform him that Botswana was prepared to withdraw from any participation in SADC's mediation efforts, withhold recognition of Mugabe as the Zimbabwean President, and cease attending SADC summits unless the Zimbabwean government provided Morgan Tsvangirai a passport and "Mugabe stopped playing games." Khama believes that this threat forced the GOZ to issue Tsvangirai's passport in December and broke the impasse in negotiations. Moving to the summit itself, Khama said that the meeting began late due to the late arrival of the Swazi King, and that some of the other participants were frustrated by both the late start and the length of the meeting. Lesotho, for example, Khama cited as seeming frustrated at spending time on yet another Zimbabwe meeting and would do all it could to move the process along quickly. Khama explained that the dialogue was almost exclusively among the heads of state. He said that both he and Tanzanian President Kikwete were the most active participants, and that they confronted Mugabe on issues. He seemed disappointed that the new Zambian President Banda did not contribute. Khama noted that Banda is "a gentleman, nice and pleasant" but felt that with the passing of Mwanawasa he had lost an ally in Zambia within the SADC proceedings. The Chairman restricted most of the summit to only heads of state or senior country representatives, which meant that MDC was not permitted in the room. Khama argued that it made no sense to try to articulate MDC concerns and positions without Morgan Tsvangirai and Welshman Ncube present, but he was over-ruled

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as Lesotho, DRC, and others insisted that SADC protocol permitted only heads of state in such meetings. Tsvangirai and Ncube were only allowed in the room late in the meeting.

14. (C) Regarding distribution of governorships, the summit agreed that ZANU-PF monopoly on governorships was untenable, but they could not agree upon a fair distribution of the 10 positions amongst the three parties. It was resolved that MDC-T, MDC-M, and ZANU-PF negotiators will meet and negotiate the distribution. MDC-T wants 5 seats for itself, 4 for ZANU, and one for MDC-M, based on parliamentary seats. ZANU claims it should be 5-4-1 (ZANU getting 5) based on "popular vote," while MDC-M wants a 4-4-2 split based on the negotiated allocation of cabinet positions. Mugabe conceded that the governorships could be negotiated immediately, however, it was not decided when the incumbent governors would be removed.

15. (C) Khama reports that he attempted to re-open discussion on the allocation of the Home Affairs Ministry. He still feels that the sharing of the Ministry is unworkable and will create a mess. Another country suggested that to be fair, perhaps the Defense portfolio should also be shared between ZANU-PF and MDC. However, Mugabe strongly objected to this idea and it was dropped. The Chairman suggested, because of depth of mistrust and suspicion on both sides, it would be better for all sides to work together in government in order to get beyond the acrimony and begin to build some confidence, and after six months review ministerial portfolios. President Khama says that he objected, noting that only Home Affairs was in dispute, and President Kikwete supported him. Though Khama and Kikwete could not convince their colleagues that only Home Affairs should be reviewed, Khama did succeed in getting SADC to remove any mention of the sharing of Home Affairs from the communique.

16. (C) President Khama told the Ambassadors that the issue of the abducted MDC members and NGO activists was raised during the summit. Tsvangirai insisted that all the abductees be released immediately, but Mugabe objected insisting that they had all broken the law and that is why they had been "arrested." Welshman Ncube suggested that since they had been arraigned in the courts, that this issue

should be put aside for the moment to allow the negotiations to continue. Khama indicated that the assumption was that once the unity government was formed, they would be released quickly.

Khama's Impressions of Mugabe

17. (S) Robert Mugabe's demeanor was calm, pleasant and collected during the summit, according to Khama. He did not bang on the table like he had at previous summits. Khama senses that Mugabe is no longer the "strong-man" of years past and he believes that Mugabe may personally be ready to make a deal, but notes that he is now cornered by his own hard-liners. Khama also believes that Mugabe is feeling the pressure of Zimbabwe's deteriorating situation. President Khama told the Chiefs of Mission that Mugabe started dozing off as the hours passed, head nodding and eyes half-closed, but according to Khama, Mugabe was always able to respond at the right moments, which Khama characterized as having "mastered the art of sleeping with one ear open."

18. (S) President Khama had a harsh exchange with Mugabe when the issue of MDC training in Botswana came up in passing. (Note: When discussing the missing MDC and opposition activists, Mugabe said they had been arrested due to training "in another country." He didn't mention Botswana specifically. End Note.) Khama said that he confronted Mugabe, complaining this was just a typical distraction tactic on his part. Khama argued out that Mugabe and the GOZ had never previously raised these training camp allegations, either in recent bilateral meetings or to former President Mogae in their periodic meetings, and no Zimbabwean military officials ever brought this allegation to Khama himself when he was Commander of the BDF. Khama then told the assembled

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Heads of State that he would step down as President if Zimbabwe's allegations were found to be true, but asked if Mugabe would also agree to resign if they turned out to be false. According to Khama, Mugabe did not respond.

19. (S) According to Khama, at the end of summit, Mugabe asked to speak, and he adopted a conciliatory posture. He thanked all the countries - including Botswana, South Africa, and Zambia - that had helped Zimbabwe with its cholera epidemic. Mugabe said that the cholera epidemic had taken the GOZ by surprise, and that they never expected it to get to its current levels. Khama opined that Mugabe's more conciliatory posture results from the pressure he is under. Per Khama, Mugabe is aware that his options are dwindling and he needs to find a way out.

Frustration with the MDC

110. (S) At the end of the summit, Khama says that the points of the communique were all briefed to Tsvangirai and he agreed to them. Khama was therefore not pleased at Tsvangirai's public statements at the end of the summit, which seemed to be backsliding on his part. According to President Khama, former President Mbeki made the same complaint about the MDC. Per Mbeki, the MDC actually first proposed the idea of sharing the Home Affairs Ministry, then later they backed away and condemned the idea. According to Khama, this shifting of positions undermined the MDC in the eyes of other SADC members.

111. (S) President Khama also reported that he met privately with Morgan Tsvangirai in Gaborone January 28, and he asked about the perception that MDC had changed its position on the deal. According to Khama, Tsvangirai somewhat disavowed the MDC statement issued in response to the communique, calling it "just a first reaction." Tsvangirai assured Khama that most in the MDC would agree to the unity government and the timeline and it would be approved by the MDC National Council, though some hard-liners would object. Tsvangirai wanted to avoid the danger of the MDC being seen as the "bad

guys," sensing that if they refused the SADC deal, they would be held responsible for plight of the Zimbabwean people and prolonging their suffering through intransigence, while ZANU-PF had publicly accepted the timeline. Khama reported that he advised Tsvangirai to patch up relations with the Mutambara faction of the MDC soon in order to strengthen their position against ZANU-PF. Khama stressed that Tsvangirai and the MDC can continue to count on his advice and support, including after they enter government.

Vision of the Way Ahead

¶12. (C) The bottom line for President Khama was that the agreement is not ideal and he would have preferred to see genuine elections in Zimbabwe, but he recognizes that they will be impossible under current circumstances. He said that this is a Zimbabwean problem and ultimately only the Zimbabweans can resolve it. Khama also noted that the MDC have themselves partly to blame for allowing Mugabe to stay in power after the June elections. He said he can only be hopeful the unity government will succeed this time. He also noted that SADC is "agitated" at having the finger of blame constantly pointed at them for Zimbabwe's problems. The prevailing attitude within SADC, according to President Khama, is that "it is the Zimbabweans who can't get their act together, so blame them, not us."

¶13. (C) President Khama stressed that the Joint Implementation and Monitoring Committee (JMIC) must be set up and functioning immediately for this deal to succeed. He noted that former President Mbeki will convene the JMIC, and though Zimbabweans from all three parties will be on the committee, SADC will still play a role in guaranteeing the process. Ambassador Nolan asked President Khama whether he believes that Mugabe is entering this agreement with good faith. Khama expressed some skepticism about whether the deal will hold, but noted that he believes "there are no

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other options at present." Khama also said that the timeline's benchmarks will quickly demonstrate whether or not Mugabe is serious.

Advice for the International Community

¶14. (S) There was some discussion about the many changes the US, UK and Europe would have to see on the ground before removing sanctions or changing our overall posture toward Zimbabwe. President Khama clearly understood this, but he also counseled that it would be helpful for the United States and other friends of Zimbabwe to engage at a political level "sooner rather than later" with the new government. Increasing humanitarian assistance quickly would also be an important step, according to Khama, but he said that he knows there will be reluctance to provide development and reconstruction assistance absent concrete evidence of change. He also suggested that it would be helpful for the US, UK, and Europe to issue positive statements about the new government, to give people in Zimbabwe confidence that what they have done has the backing of the international community, to show that there is a willingness to enter into dialogue, and that "there is light at the end of the tunnel."

¶15. (S) Khama acknowledged that the sanctions question will arise. He advised that if the western countries simply say that sanctions will continue indefinitely, it will throw cold water on the agreement and will not be well-received in the SADC region. According to Khama, this sort of statement will also feed Mugabe's considerable paranoia about Western motives. Instead, Khama counseled that western governments could try to focus on the positive, by mentioning types of humanitarian assistance that can be provided quickly and engaging in limited political dialogue, while also leaving the door open to reviewing sanctions in the near future and promising to link action on the sanctions to solid evidence of progress and reform. If the new government does not make

satisfactory progress on key benchmarks, engagement could then be slowed or halted. President Khama also suggested that the international community could send a fact-finding delegation to Zimbabwe in approximately three months to assess such progress, and then base future US engagement with the GOZ on their report. Khama mentioned that our feedback on what is happening inside Zimbabwe and information about our humanitarian programs would be useful to him, and he offered to present information about ZANU-PF backsliding or misconduct to SADC if needed.

NOLAN